

What to consider when you are thinking about adding agritourism



By Tana Canen with Montana Moments LLC on Mahlstedt Ranch



Our ranch is located in western Dawson County along the Divide on the Missouri drainage side. We are a diversified ag operation and are known for our roan ranch-bred Quarter Horses. Currently the 3rd, 4th, and 5th generations of our small family are working together on our 100+ year-old ranch.

For our ranch, *Sharing Agriculture* is our story and it is a story that keeps developing. We've had foreign exchange workers live and work with us on the ranch. We have summer interns. We invite our town friends to branding and horse halter breaking weekends to learn about our way of life and experience it in a fun way. Ag advocacy is critically important to us as producers and the world who depends on us to feed them.

Things you need to consider when starting an agritourism enterprise:

1. Do you enjoy people? If no one in your family does, you might want to look at other options.
2. Do you know what you are getting in to? Definitely do your research. Be sure you know the strengths and weaknesses of every aspect of your operation. Time needed with guests, location (gravel roads, distance from town), weather patterns, options offered, dangers, etc.
3. Be happy being you! While we can learn from others and incorporate great ideas, what we offer has to be uniquely us. Our story is unique to us. You know the unique wonders of your ranch and your story. Be ready to market and tell that story.
4. Start insurance early. Develop a relationship with your agent. Be open and honest about what you will offer and share your concerns.
5. Consider how to protect your operation. Ideas: set up an LLC, add additional liability insurance, have waivers and signage, and visit with your attorney.



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6. Be flexible. This is very challenging for some family members (often the older generations). Things never go the way we want or as quickly as we want. People complain. People and things fail. Expect problems. Breathe and roll with it. Change as needed.
7. Be a marketer or hire someone who is. A well-developed website with a strong following is key. I highly recommend Kristin with ranchermarketing.com. Plus, be active on social media.
8. Be responsible. Tourism allows us to remain competitive in agriculture. It also holds us accountable. As we pursue more sustainable methods of managing our land and animals, people are there to see if it's working, if we are doing our best.



We are using Montana's number one industry (Agriculture) to capitalize on another important MT industry (Tourism). This sets up a platform from which we can share our story. I call myself an AGVOCATE. By inviting people to come stay on our ranch, we are hoping to reach people with the true story of American agriculture. We also give the story of family working together, caring for the land, raising quality animals in a quality way, and sometimes..... the struggles of the life we live. I hope, too, that we can minister to their needs. People need to relax, breath fresh air, see the stars, and be amazed at sunrises and sunsets like they have never seen before.

Most importantly through all of this, we are making friends for Agriculture.

We share the good of what we do and how we do it to feed the world in a responsible, environmentally friendly manner.

This helps our family stay in production agriculture.

It is expanding our agriculture advocacy platform.

We offer a unique opportunity for people wanting to see the real Montana with their tourism dollars and thus, bring dollars to our local economies.

